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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000266

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EUR FOR DAS BRYZA, EUR/ACE FOR T. ADAMS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: KOCHARIAN'S CHIEF OF STAFF SEEKS TO EJECT NDI FROM ARMENIA

REF: A. 06 YEREVAN 1679

[B](#). 06 YEREVAN 1685

[C](#). YEREVAN 0262

Classified By: CDA A.F.Godfrey for Reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

1. (C) Armen Gevorgian, President Kocharian's Chief of Staff, told NDI Country co-Directors on March 6 that NDI should shut down their operations until after the May 12 elections. Gevorgian, assuming that NDI Armenia had arranged for a senior oppositionist to visit Washington in February, said that NDI had failed in its goal to bring an opposition-led government to power and that NDI could have no further influence on the outcome of elections. NDI Country co-Directors pushed back, asserting that Gevorgian did not understand NDI's goals. On March 7, in a previously scheduled, meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Kirakossian, CDA registered our concern and informed the MFA that as far as the USG was concerned, NDI was still in the process of implementing an important part of our Democracy Promotion Strategy and would continue its activities. End Summary.

After a Short Break, NDI Armenia Back On Thin Ice

2. (C) NDI's program in Armenia has been in jeopardy for some time. During the November 8-9 visit to Armenia of EUR Assistance Coordinator Tom Adams (ref a), President Kocharian complained bitterly -- as he had many times in the past -- that NDI's activity was intended solely to bring about a "color revolution" led by a bloc of opposition parties which NDI would cobble together. Adams assured Kocharian that this was not the case, and said he would encourage NDI President Ken Wollack to come to Armenia to make this even more clear. Wollack's November 29 visit to Armenia (ref b) was largely successful in allaying Kocharian's fears. Following these visits, NDI had been careful to maintain transparency about its operations and to keep President Kocharian's office informed of NDI's project goals.

Opposition Leader's Trip to Washington Strikes A Nerve

3. (C) On February 10 - 18, Aram Sargsian, president of the radical oppositionist "Republic" party, visited the U.S. Press coverage in Armenia was full of allegations that NDI arranged Sargsian's schedule in Washington and alleged that NDI experts had drafted remarks which Sargsian presented on February 13 at the Carnegie Endowment.

... Kocharian's Hatchet Man Strikes Back

¶4. (C) On March 6, NDI Country co-Directors Andrew Bennett (Canadian) and Taline Sanassarian (Amcit) met, at their request, with Kocharian's Chief of Staff to brief him on NDI's programs. Gevorgian told them that he believed that NDI only sought to work with parties like Sargsian's and stated that NDI's "program to bring about an opposition coalition" in Armenia had failed. (See Ref c for details on how the Armenian opposition has self-destructed.) He said that there was very little which NDI could now do to affect the outcome of the parliamentary elections on May 12, so NDI should just close down its operations until after the elections. He expected all of the NDI staff to vacate its offices, and suggested that they leave only one person to answer the telephone. He rejected a formal, written request from NDI Washington to have NDI members accredited to observe the election "given the relationship Armenia has with NDI."

¶5. (C) Bennett and Sanassarian told us they pushed back, explaining their programs, and rejecting the assertion that NDI had arranged for all Sargsian's visit. They highlighted portions of NDI's program which Gevorgian had previously supported, but Gevorgian was not swayed.

Charge Defends NDI at Foreign Ministry

¶6. (C) On March 7, at a previously scheduled meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Arman Kirakossian, CDA reported the outcome of the meeting with NDI. CDA told Kirakossian that NDI was carrying out a USG-funded program which was an integral part of our Democracy Promotion Strategy. As far as the USG was concerned, NDI was still welcome to continue its activities and would continue its work until the Mission was

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formally told otherwise. We reminded Kirakossian that Millennium Challenge Corporation Vice President John Hewko would be in Armenia later in the week and that any action against NDI would be especially untimely.

Comment

¶7. (C) It is clear that Kocharian considered NDI's work to arrange Sargsian's visit in Washington as NDI reneging on what he believed was an agreement with Adams and Wollack. We will continue to push back on this misconception and will seek to persuade Gevorgian that ejecting NDI is against Armenia's interest. Gevorgian, a powerful grey eminence in Kocharian's machine, will almost certainly remain unconvinced. We are hopeful, however, that through engaging other, more progressive elements in the GOAM, we will be able to keep NDI's program operating in Armenia, even if in a more muted manner. We have asked the two NDI Country co-Directors to be in closer contact with the Mission and advised them to conduct themselves as if all of their actions were under scrutiny, as they surely are.

GODFREY